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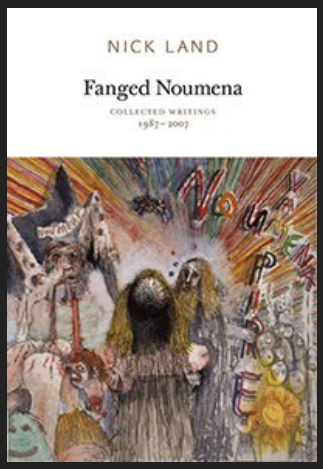
Nick Land – Hallucinatory but razor strict: accelerationist and inhumanly progressive thoughts: rabid nihilism, mad black deleuzianism, cybergothic



Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, Urbanomic, Sequence Press, 2011.

"Fanged Noumena brings together the writings of Nick Land for the first time. During the 1990s Land's unique philosophical work, variously described as 'rabid nihilism', 'mad black deleuzianism' and 'cybergothic', developed perhaps the only rigorous and culturally-engaged escape route out of the malaise of 'continental philosophy' - a route which was implacably blocked by the academy. However, Land's work has continued to exert an influence, both through the British 'speculative realist' philosophers who studied with him, and through the many cultural producers - artists, musicians, filmmakers, bloggers - who have been invigorated by his uncompromising and abrasive philosophical vision.
Beginning with Land's early radical rereadings of Heidegger, Nietzsche, Kant and Bataille, the volume then collects together the papers, talks and articles of the mid-90s - long the subject of rumour and vague legend (including some work which has never previously appeared in print) - in which Land developed his futuristic theory-fiction of cybercapitalism gone amok; and ends with his enigmatic later writings in which Ballardian fictions, poetics, cryptography, anthropology, grammatology and the occult are smeared into unrecognisable hybrids.
Fanged Noumena allows a dizzying perspective on the entire trajectory of this provocative and influential thinker's work, and will introduce his unique voice to a new generation of readers."

"Land's incisive assessment of the machinic reality of a schizo-capitalism currently in the process of penetrating and colonizing the innermost recesses of human subjectivity exposes the fatally anachronistic character of the metaphysical conception of human agency upon which 'revolutionary' thought continues to rely. The anachronistic character of left voluntarism is nowhere more apparent than in its resort to a negative theology of perpetually deferred 'hope', mordantly poring over its own reiterated depredation. Worse still is the complacent sanctimony of those 'critical' theorists who concede that the prospect of revolutionary transformation is not only unattainable but undesirable (given its dangerously 'totalitarian' propensities), but who remain content to pursue a career in critique, safely insulated from the risks of political praxis. The challenge of Land's work cannot be circumvented by construing the moral dismay it (often deliberately) provokes as proof of its erroneous nature, or by exploiting the inadequacies in Land's positive construction as an excuse to evade the corrosive critical implications of his thought. Nor can it be concluded that this alternative philosophical path cannot be further explored. […] Everything in Land's work that falls outside the parameters of disciplinary knowledge can and will be effectively dismissed by those who police the latter. In Bataille's incisive formulation, 'the unknown […] is not distinguished from nothingness by anything that discourse can announce'. Like his fellows of the 'inferior race', what we retain of Land's expeditions are diverse and scattered remnants, here constellated for the first time. These are also tools or weapons; arrows that deserve to be taken up again and sharpened further. The wound needs to be opened up once more, and if this volume infects a new generation, already enlivened by a new wave of thinkers who are partly engaging the re-emerging legacy of Nick Land's work – it will have fulfilled its purpose." - **Ray Brassier and Robin Mackay**

"The magnitude of Nick Land's influence upon contemporary experimental production is yet to be fully comprehended. Whilst Fanged Noumena goes some way to provide an aetiology of Land's

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    - Renee Gladman - Ontological crisis:

philosophical virulence, those seeking a cure for the 'disease of the earth' are advised to look elsewhere ...” - **Jake Chapman**

“Land had the most brilliantly seductive and meteoric mind, endlessly imaginative and capable of adopting, inhabiting and discarding any philosophical position. With him - and rightly so - philosophy infected every area of life, and sheer vitality of life reverberated in his thinking.
I see Fanged Noumena as a kind of righteous revenge. Nick was dismissed by professional philosophers because they simply didn't want to think and preferred their turgid academic complacency. I always admired him for his unwavering desire to take thought to its absolute limit and then see how much harder one could push.” - Simon Critchley

These extraordinary texts, superheated compounds of severe abstraction and scabrous wit, testify to a uniquely penetrating intelligence, fusing transcendental philosophy, number theory, geophysics, biology, cryptography and occultism into startlingly cohesive but increasingly delirious theory-fictions.” - **Ray Brassier**

This is theory as cyberpunk fiction: Deleuze-Guattari's concept of capitalism as the virtual unnameable Thing that haunts all previous formations pulp-welded to the timebending of the Terminator films. Land's machinic theory-poetry parallelled the digital intensities of 90s jungle, techno and doomcore, anticipating 'impending human extinction becoming accessible as a dance-floor'.” - **Mark Fisher (K-Punk)**

“In the last half of the twentieth century, academics talked endlessly about the outside, but no-one went there. Land, by exemplary contrast, made experiments in the unknown unavoidable for a philosophy caught in the abstractive howl of post-political cybernetics. Fanged Noumena demonstrates how Land ruined a generation of intellectuals for merely academic philosophy, by opening a speculative singularity where the future used to be.” -
Iain Hamilton Grant

“British philosopher Nick Land has left a legacy. His character is mythological and his critical interpretations are legend. Since the early 90's his thoughts and critiques have been at the epicenter (or even been the genesis) of numerous directions of enquiry. A myriad of multi-media, artistic, linguistic, logical, literary criticism and blogospherical areas of research have all derived and swelled since his teachings as lecturer in Continental Philosophy at Warwick University in the 1990's and his co-founding of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU- co-founded with philosopher Sadie Plant at Birmingham University in 1995). His thoughts of 'rabid nihilism', 'mad black deleuzianism' and 'cybergothic' have spawned a multitude of modes of enquiry. The proliferating use of hyperstition as a tool in pursuit of dismantling standard models of social existence is one particularly prevalent effect of Lands philosophical and inspirational legacy - Reza Negarestani's occultist, post genre horror fictions and speculative theologix of Cyclonopedia being a recent example of a work derived, formed and inherently born out of the mode of the hyperstition praxis formats (and the eponymous blog - Hyperstition that Land also contributed to). Just reading the preface of Lands infamous critique/engagement/copulation/putrefaction of Bataille in 'The Thirst For Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism' (Routledge Press 1992) the effect is violent, scary and profound. The level of emotion, the passion for the myriad of philosophies (and their contextual exchanges) is frightening and unique. When was the last time you put down a theory text feeling worried? When was the last time a theory text scarred you or made you sad? I can't think of anyone else. The only other book to effect such a response in myself recently was Eden Eden Eden by Pierre Guyotat - but thats fiction, and the fact that Lands impassioned engagement is focused on theories, established (and/or erupting/hemorrhaging paradigms) warrants all the more emotion and genuine interest, be it excitement, fear or elation - and thats just Lands unique delivery. The breadth of inspiration and the sheer volume of research areas and texts is phenomenal. Aqunias, Boltzmann, Hegel, Kant, Lukacs, Nietzsche, Marquis de Sade and Schopenhauer are just a few of the general reference Land draws on along with an almost encyclopedic referencing to Bataille's Oeuvres Completes that boarders on the religious - in that the connections and interpretations are engaged and impassioned to the nth degree. The experience is akin to an array of biblical epics - such is the breadth of emotional journeyings and weight of theoretical revelations.
Regarding just a few of the concepts brought forward, re-examined or re-integrated within the text it dawns on one just how influential Land has been. The penetration of fleeting analogies is vast and whole new modes of enquiry and axis for ontological explorations have emerged from the rabid flames of 'The Thirst For Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism'. Ontotheological and Logocentricist reassertions dance amongst a laughing cacophony of eroticist, morbid and transcendental polarities. If you were scarred by Bataille then dont read Land for the experience may enlighten enough to expose the putrid truth of ourselves life and death. This petrifying (or putrefying!) text holds so much at the epicenter of its (panoramic) rhizomatically aquired realms of research yet its so concentrated and potent. Lands other works that will all be included in Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007 (to be published by Urbanomic in 2010) will no doubt have the same spectrum of revelations and potency of effect, for whilst a lot of these works have in existence since the 90s and their influence now fossilized in legend, the availability has been low with the texts

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scattered through small philosophical journals, blog posts and experimental webzine articals. Having a collection of such (still) vital texts is long overdue. I have no doubt that for Landians the consequence of having all texts in one place will further enlighten the rabid, mad or fatally sane ideological reproaches and contextual arguments. Another MetaStrata may emerge from this text. Lands Fanged Noumena are ominous - like rabid piranhas - or suspended maggots awaiting our putrefying minds and souls." – **Notes from the Vomitorium**

"I've been reading the essays collected in Nick Land's *Fanged Noumena* on-and-off over the last year, and I'm now running out of unread pages, so I thought it'd be a good time to briefly summarize some of my initial reactions. Overall, I am very positive of his work, of course, and will reference it a lot in the future, so these are just some scattered notes based on my first reading:
1. I think that his work can be divided into three, or possibly four, phases: his initial readings of a number of important western philosophers (Kant, Heidegger, Bataille, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, etc. – his book on Bataille obviously belongs to this phase), his nihilistic reconsideration of Deleuze and Guattari and acceleration of global capitalism (unsurprisingly the phase I'm most interested in), and finally his numerical phase. The possible fourth phase would be the current writings on his blog, although I have yet to look at them more in-depth.
2. His writing style is truly remarkable, and even though I've become known as someone who generally prefers lucidity over obscurity, I cannot deny the pure delight in reading these dark pieces of theory-fiction (although I don't think they're super difficult to follow). I think it was Kodwo Eshun who said that even though there were a lot of writings on cybernetics in the 90's, what made Land's work stand out was that it really felt like it was coming from the machines themselves. Here the "form" obviously follows the "content" (or rather feeds back into it) – that is, Land's vision of the "cyberneticization of theory", rather than another "theory of cybernetics" – and the result is a remarkable collection of theory-fiction essays. Of course, it's easy to simply dismiss these writings as some kind of bizarre stylistic experiment with little actual content, but this is simply not the truth, since embedded in these texts are a number of serious philosophical ideas, or, as Ray Brassier has put it: "No matter how much one may detest their rhetorical animus, it's simply not enough to dismiss them as a kind of puerile, indulgent hyper-Nietzscheanism. It's far more sophisticated than that […]".
3. After having read these texts, and also spent the last few years in the UK (with people who studied with Land, such as Mark, Kodwo, and Luciana), it's remarkable to see how influential he has been on several people who now are singular and important thinkers of their own. He obviously shaped the collective concept-engineering of the Ccru (particularly after Sadie Plant had left), and also supervised the postgrad work of Ray Brassier and Iain Hamilton Grant, who now have become central figures in current speculative realist thought, which is something that one easily can trace back to Land's work too. And some recent to quite recent books which are clearly influenced by Land's thought includes: Brassier's *Nihil Unbound* (speculative nihilism, the death-drive), Grant's *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (Schelling vis-á-vis Deleuze and Guattari, naturephilosophy), Luciana's *Abstract Sex* (meiotic, bacterical sex, etc., the work of Lynn Margulis), Mark's *Capitalist Realism* (the acceleration of capitalism), Kodwo's *More Brilliant than the Sun* (the writing-style and inhuman futurism), Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* (perhaps the most proper "post-Landian" work), and even less obvious examples such as Simon Reynolds' (who have mentioned Land's influence on his work) *Generation Ecstasy/Energy Flash*, such as when he writes about jungle as the acceleration of technology – understood as the motor of late capitalism – which resonates with Land's "impending human extinction becoming accessible as a dance floor". The parallels between 90's jungle and Land's work have of course often been noted, but the key thing here is that it was not that Land wrote "about" jungle, or that jungle artists were even aware of Land, but rather that they both produced similar forms of intensities: jungle as what Steve Goodman/Kode9 calls a "theory-generating machine", and Land's theory as the philosophical equivalence of jungle.
4. Besides the above, the parallels between Land's and DeLanda's work cannot go unnoticed. I do in fact think of Land as something like DeLanda's evil philosophical twin, and it's interesting to note how their careers have converged and diverged in several ways. Land comes from a background in classical academic philosophy, whereas DeLanda was this hip underground guy with no academic credentials whatsoever (except a BA in fine art), but now DeLanda is the academic – a professor in philosophy – whereas Land left the university in the late 90's and now works as an independent writer in Asia. But it was in the early/mid-90's when their paths did converge, in relation to Ccru, the Virtual Futures Conferences, etc., and when they both emerged with their important readings of Deleuze and Guattari's work (which still are among the most productive ones, I would argue, alongside people like Brian Massumi and Michael Hardt). These readings are also marked by convergences and divergences: both DeLanda and Land are hardcore materialists, and argued against philosophical idealism and anthropocentrism long before speculative realism emerged (and in their introduction to *Fanged Noumena*, Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier note that Land's destratification of Kant's transcendental philosophy in fact must be read as an early version of Quentin Meillassoux's attack on correlationism in philosophy). One may actually summarize their projects as different attempts to rethink historical materialism beyond Marx (and, in particular, beyond Marx's Hegel), in favor of Deleuze and Guattari's work, but whereas DeLanda finds his route in *A Thousand Plateaus* and Fernand Braudel's writings (particularly the *Civilization and Capitalism*-trilogy), Land pursues the path of *Anti-Oedipus* and Jean-Francois Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy*. This is also where their work diverges, because whereas DeLanda favors the more sober and vitalistic Deleuze and Guattari from

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ATP (“one should not deterritorialize too much”, etc.), Land rather goes in the direction of the more schizophrenic Deleuze and Guattari from AO (“the body without organs is the body of death”, etc.). And, indeed, here DeLanda’s neo-vitalism and immanent ethics that he draws from Deleuze’s Spinoza and modern complexity-theory, stand in sharp contrast to Land’s rabid nihilism and death-drive that comes from coupling Deleuze and Guattari with Freud and Schopenhauer (and subtracting the Bergsonian component, obviously).

5. In his review of Brassier’s *Nihil Unbound*, Eugene Thacker notes that it’s the strength of Brassier’s work to have reinvented nihilism after existentialism and postmodernism, but this is something that Land also must be credited with (although Brassier builds on his work beautifully in his own writings). His rabid nihilism is far from “an existential [i.e. human] quandary, but a speculative opportunity”, as Brassier puts it in the beginning of his book, when diagnosing the shortcomings of our understanding of nihilism in philosophy. And this specific form of speculative nihilism is something that really has affected my own thinking since I came to the UK, because whereas I previously considered myself to be a hardcore vitalist (in fact, even some of the most recent posts on this blog argues against nihilism as a philosophical position), I’ve actually more and more come to accept nihilism as a major philosophical stance. This is something that I will need to work through more thoroughly in the future, so I won’t say too much about it here, except that one of the main reasons for this turn is because it seems to me that it has the capacity to articulate the relationship between the human and non-human in a more satisfactory way than many vitalist philosophies. What I’m thinking about here is the world we humans have constructed for ourselves (what Eugene Thacker calls “the-world-for-us”), and the world as it exists in-itself (“the-world-without-us”), with its indifference to our concerns. This comes closer to Ray Brassier’s work than Land’s perhaps, but I do think there is continuity between the two, which I’m interested in thinking through more in the future. Of course, the vitalist counter-argument here would be (as Steven Shaviro has put it) that there is a certain anthropocentrism in this position, in that it nevertheless assumes that we humans are something special and extra important. But I’m not so sure about that, because even though I’d probably agree with the so-called “flat ontology” that has become a popular concept in various forms of vitalist thought since DeLanda’s reconsideration of the term, I think that the problem with this is that it fails to articulate the *epistemological* disjunction between the human and the non-human (even if it might be ontologically valid, which is why I’ve become more interested in Brassier’s work, because he is really trying to articulate this disjunction in his current writings). Once again, this is something that I’m currently trying to think through, so I don’t have that much to say about it for the moment, except that Land’s and Brassier’s work have been helpful in this regard.

6. Land’s critique of representation – or materialization of critique, or attempt to “convert the ideal conditioning of the representation of matter to the material conditioning of ideal representation” – is a brilliant reworking of the Deleuzian critique of representation minus the Bergsonian component. Of course, this removal of Bergson has made a number of thinkers, most notably Ray Brassier and Benjamin Noys, to criticize Land for reproducing the classical philosophical problem between thought and reality (because without the Bergsonian vitalist phenomenology of sub-representational intuition, how do you access reality-in-itself, or the machinic unconscious?), but I’m not sure if I agree with that. True, of course, that by removing Bergson something else has to replace intuition along the continuum of “thought-as-matter and matter-as-thought”, but I think that there is a candidate here: machinism. Here I’m particularly thinking of a number of brief passages where he talks about how “VR [i.e. virtual reality] will denaturalize thought”, which really resonates with my own project in quite intriguing ways, since it is one of my basic arguments (following everyone from Deleuze to Mark Hansen) that new media technologies do not simply reproduce human cognition, but embody *their own cognition*. In other words, media technology cannot simply be reduced to the reproduction of human representational categories, but must rather be understood precisely to denaturalize thought (or transform thought, etc.), which I think could replace intuition as the functional link (or even as the dissolution, to put it in the most extreme Landian terms) between thought and reality. And Bergson himself was also very skeptical regarding new media technologies (remember his critique of cinema for, precisely, just “reproducing the conditions of natural perception”), but as Deleuze has argued (against Bergson) in the cinema-books: cinema (or new media in general) do not simply reproduce natural perception, but it is a mode of perceiving, and even thinking, in-itself. I really think that one could extract an entire speculative philosophy of media from passages like this, and this is really what I’m interested in doing in my dissertation, so Land’s work will be really useful in that regard. This is condensed in particular in his “machinic practice”, and its radical insistence to fuse thought into material reality. True, of course (as Brassier and Mark have pointed out), that there is a number of problems that appear when one so violently tries to destratify thought and theoretical reflection, but it seems to me that it perhaps would be more interesting to think through machinic practice in relation to new media (which Land already has hinted at, of course) in light of current technological mutations of bodies and thoughts (and against notions of human authenticity and “realness”), which, again, is what I will be dealing with in the dissertation. Also, what really attracts me with his machinic practice is that it’s less of an epistemological turn than the one DeLanda seems to have taken in his later books. Of course, there is perhaps more of a difference in degree than in kind here, but I remember reading an interview with Elizabeth Grosz where she says how she is more interested in materialism than realism precisely because the latter seems to be too bound up with epistemological concerns, which is a problem in the sense that it operates too much according to representational congruence. And, indeed, compared to early interviews with DeLanda (where he talks about tripping in Mexico, the brain

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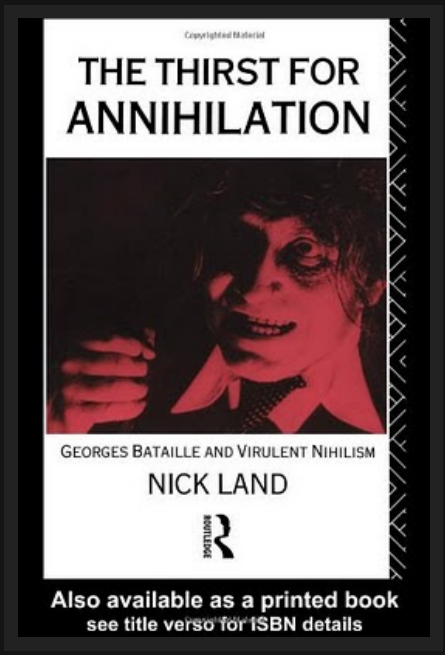
as a supercomputer, and artificial intelligence bypassing human intelligence), his latest books (see in particular *Philosophy and Simulation*) are less interested in denaturalizing thought than in the epistemological problem of how do we acquire knowledge of the real. Hence this is where one may detect some inner tensions between a realist epistemology and a materialist eschatology, and I'm much more interested in the latter, since it seems to me that it is much more useful in understanding the current mutations in contemporary techno-culture.

7. And, finally, accelerationism. I don't want to say too much about this right now, since I'm currently working on a number of pieces that deal with this topic more specifically (and it will probably appear in the dissertation as well), but regardless of how much one may dislike the Landian vision of capitalism as an inhuman invasion from the future that dissolves human culture into "dehumanized, emptied landscapes" (what Benjamin Noys has called "Deleuzian Thatcherism"), one at least has to admit that it (along with Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* in particular) represents a sobering contrast to many classical leftist critiques of capital. But, of course, there are a number of problem here, such as that this position is completely dependent on the controversial argument that there is a tendency in capital towards inorganic dissolution – but if this is not the case, well, then there is nothing but capital at the end of the road. And here I think that Mark has made a number of important arguments against Landian accelerationism, particularly in bringing back Deleuze and Guattari's argument that capital does not just deterritorialize, but also *reterritorialize* – because otherwise it would not function properly *as* capital – which undoubtedly stands in sharp contrast to the Landian model of capital as inorganic dissolution *qua* death. Indeed, this is a controversial argument, which also, despite its radical futurism, nevertheless has a distinct flavor of some of the most dated Marxist arguments (i.e. that capitalism in-itself will dissolve into socialism, which seems like pure nonsense today, although for Land it's not socialism that awaits of course), so with this in mind it seems to me that Mark's suggestion to reconsider this speculative accelerationism in a more instrumentalized form (by bringing back human agency as opposed to just capital as "Terminator-agency") is an interesting alternative. But, once again, this is work-in-progress (I have, for instance, not yet even read Reza Negarestani's text on this topic), so no final word here." - **Jon Lindblom**


THE THIRST FOR ANNIHILATION
GEORGES BATAILLE AND VIRULENT NIHILISM
NICK LAND
Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details

Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation : Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism*, Routledge, 1992.

"An important literary and philosophical figure, Georges Bataille has had a significant influence on other French writers, such as Foucault, Derrida and Baudrillard. The Thirst for Annihilation is the first book in English to respond to Bataille's writings. In no way, though, is Nick Land's book an attempt to appropriate Bataille's writings to a secular intelligibility or to compromise with the aridity of academic discourse - rather, it is written as a communion . Theoretical issues in philosophy, sociology, psychodynamics, politics and poetry are discussed, but only as stepping stones into the deep water of textual sacrifice where words pass over into the broken voice of death. Cultural modernity is diagnosed down to its Kantian bedrock with its transcendental philosophy of the object, but Bataille's writings cut violently across this tightly disciplined reading to reveal the strong underlying currents that bear us towards chaos and dissolution - the violent impulse to escape, the thirst for annihilation."

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The Dark Enlightenment (The Complete Series) by Nick Land

bam-pow-oof.tumblr.com/post/37857338807/the-dark-enlightenment-the-complete-series-by-nick

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Francesco Colonna, Hypnerotomachia Poliphili: The Strife of Love in a Dream, Trans. by Joscelyn Godwin, Thames & Hudson; Reissue ed. 200...

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